Christ Among His Fellowmen

By Harriet Joor

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CHRIST AMONG HIS FELLOWMEN

BY HARRIET JOOR

GUSTAV STICKLEY
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FOREWORD

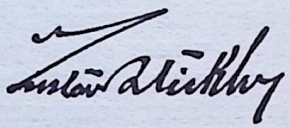
SOMETIMES there comes to the editor of a magazine an utterance so good, so universal in its appeal to the great heart of humanity, that it demands individual existence in a form that places it within the reach of everyone as a permanent possession.

Such an utterance is embodied in this little book. It is a story two thousand years old, but it is told with such rare, deep insight, such wonderful beauty of feeling and expression, that it comes almost as a thing never before put into words. It is the story of the humanity of Christ, of His personal service and sympathy as well as His wise and gentle teaching, of the happiness that He found, and taught others to find, in "common things within reach of the poorest," of the true relation that He saw between the poor and the rich of this world. The whole social problem and the real meaning of Christ's teaching concerning it, is told in this one paragraph:

"In the hearts of the degraded poor there rankles ever a sullen bitterness against the rich; but in this peasant teacher, who knew that satiety, more surely even than exhausting toil, dulled a man's vision to the real meaning of life, we find none of this unreasoning hatred, instead, there is a boundless pity for beautiful souls that have been impoverished through wealth."

It is for this reason, and because it is a message to gladden and heal the tired souls of men, that "Christ Among His Fellowmen" is here reprinted in book form. Every man and woman who has felt the drag and fret of life should know the peace of this vision of what Christ's life really meant to the friends and neighbors among whom He walked in His daily round. No human being will ever read it without being better for the comfort it brings.

So it is sent forth into the turmoil of daily life to help and to heal. Of nothing am I more sure than that it will win its own welcome.



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"THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI"

CHRIST AMONG HIS FELLOWMEN

CHRIST-AMONG-HIS FELLOWMEN-BY-HARRIET-JOOR

FOR nineteen hundred years a faint, far melody, born on the far Judean plains, has echoed through the souls of men; across the centuries the Beautiful Life, touched with deathless charm and grace, still sheds its fragrance through the world; and still, as to a cool, green spot amid the sun-parched, dusty ways, men's thoughts turn wistfully to the hamlet in the hollow of the hills, where the little lad of Nazareth dwelt in the long ago.

Very little is told us of Christ's boyhood, and that little is veiled in finest reticence; yet we know that it was sheltered and sweet, unfolding as normally hour by hour

as the growing things He loved. In the laborer's cabin, furnished with a few coarse mats and earthen vessels, and, may be, a painted chest, the boy awoke to the wonder of each new dawn, and in the small dark chamber that served at once for living room and work-shop, watched Joseph at his bench, where the sweet-smelling shavings curled and foamed about the swift-flying plane. At evening, when the twilight folded all the hills in mystery, the little lad, with His hand upon His mother's gown, must often have joined the line of chattering women waiting with their water jars about the village fountain. In the narrow, crooked streets, Mary's son must have played with His small neighbors, and have gathered with them about the reader of the synagogue, in the village-school, repeating, in concert with His restless mates, bits of Hebrew scripture—burning words that thrilled the lad like organ chords.

What intuitions were stirring during the reticent child-years we know not, but at

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"THE SERMON ON THE LAKE"

the age of twelve we know there came a quickening touch that wakened the shy soul to consciousness. In that year He went up to Jerusalem for the passover, to the sacred city about which His boyish dreams had so long centered; and in the pleasant, leisurely journeying to the capital, as pilgrims from other provinces joined the party from Nazareth, the village lad came more fully into touch with His people, and was stirred by their passionate hopes as He had been of old by the prophets and poets. When Jerusalem itself shone on Him above its rocky slope,—when He entered the great temple, all radiant in white and gold, and came face to face with the reverend doctors in the crowded courts, the boy forgot Himself, forgot all shyness and awkwardness, and in breathless question and answer gave utterance to thoughts He had long pondered in silence.

We know the boy's wondering reply to the tremulous, troubled greeting of His mother, and that he returned to the carpen-

ter's home to dwell there in the gentle subjection of the past; but the old life could never be His again. There was a new significance in the sunrise and the dark, a new meaning in the lines carven by sin and pain in the faces of men and women. Never again could He walk unconscious, uncaring, through the village street, for the young heart had grown aware of its brotherhood and throbbed in poignant sympathy with the hurts it could as yet but dimly comprehend. With new grave tenderness He looked upon all living things; upon the careless sparrows gathering their food by the pathside; upon the ravens whom their heavenly Father fed; and upon the dumb, patient creatures who shared man's daily toil.

Over the little hamlet in the fold of the hills the days passed very quietly till the lad, grown to manhood, stood Himself by Joseph's bench and watched the shavings foam and curl about His own swift-gliding plane. But the heart that had throbbed of

old in boyish sympathy had only drawn closer through the years to the starved lives about Him. All day a-down the narrow street toilers passed to and fro before His workshop door, and the love-keen eyes noted each lagging step, each stooping shoulder, each tired face, where the hunger for sympathy was keener than the hunger for bread.

When querulous, despondent neighbors, fretting at life's inequalities, gathered at twilight about His mother's threshold, the son of the home, listening silently in the shadow of the lintel, knew that in the wealth they coveted lay not the peace these wearied creatures craved. For the young carpenter of Nazareth, looking on man as man, regardless of the accident of wealth or place, had found the same hungering soul, the same sensitive pain-racked body, and a heart quivering to the same elemental joys and sorrows, beneath the beggar's rags and the prince's purple, under the church-

man's fair phylacteries and a Magdalen's draggled silks.

In His clear vision the poor as well as the rich had mistaken the values of life, knowing not the "things that belonged unto their peace;" and His yearning to ease their pain,—to open the eyes that were holden unto the real meaning of life, to heal in harassed hearts this canker of bitterness that poisoned all the wholesome sweetness of their days,—grew ever stronger, until He laid down forever His workman's tools and went forth to minister unto men.

Of that brief three years' service we have only a broken record—a few words treasured in memory from the many that He spoke, a few deeds of tenderness and fragmentary pictures of the days beside the lake, among the tamarinds and oleanders. Yet from those little rolls, passed so eagerly from hand to hand among His early followers; from those hurried notes, warm from the hearts of men who had listened to His voice day after day, and felt the

warmth of His living hand, we can see how simply, how spontaneously, the public life of the Nazarene unfolded, remaining throughout one in spirit, one in self-forgetting tenderness, with the quiet earlier years. We can follow the Nazarene and His little company of friends in their leisurely journey from hamlet to hamlet, pausing now in a straggling fishing town, and now at a great farmhouse bowered in olive or pomegranate trees; resting one day at a laborer's cabin and dining the next from a fig-tree beside the way.

The whole of those three years was spent in the open. Only "at even when the sun was set," do the villagers bring their sick for healing to the threshold of the fisherman's home; through all the fair sunlit hours it is along the white winding roadways that the people press about Him. It is upon Genesaret's sandy beach that He comforts their sufferers, and it is there that the five thousand are fed, the sensitive John noting delicately that "there was much

grass in the place." We find Jesus again and again upon this beautiful lake, now rocked lightly upon its sunlit waters, leaning from Peter's fishing boat to speak comfortingly to the throngs upon the shore; again, sleeping for very weariness in a storm-tossed boat in the midst of an angry sea. We follow the little flock through the windings of the hills, and on a sunny Sabbath morning find them among the ripening wheat-fields. The whole of Christ's ministry is thus bathed in sunshine, and the breath of the fields blows yet cool and sweet through the words that He spoke.

By threshing-floor and vineyard He paused to talk with the toilers, and on Sabbath mornings in the village synagogues, where any who would might rise and speak, the simple, gracious words of this young stranger from the hill-town touched with new meaning all the dusty ways of life. Everywhere the country folk, yet sensitive to the intuitive leadings of love, heard gladly this new teacher who

answered to an instinctive need of their natures; the shyest and tenderest souls drew near, all unafraid, to this delicate spirit, and numbed creatures, too weary to comprehend the spoken word, responded to the love in the pitiful voice and tender, healing hand.

The heart of the Nazarene yearned over this childish multitude tossed to and fro like a wind-driven sea by changing impulses, and He strove by object-lessons of exquisite simplicity to teach them of the soul's life and the soul's needs. Taking their children in His arms He bade them, through their tenderness for their own little ones, interpret the love of their unseen Father; healing their sick, He told them thus would the Father heal their sick souls; and He gave them bread, common barley bread, that they could see, and touch, and taste, telling them thus, with spiritual food, would God satisfy their soul-hunger.

In the hearts of the degraded poor there rankles ever a sullen bitterness against the

rich; but in this peasant-teacher, who knew that satiety, more surely even than exhausting toil, dulled a man's vision to the real meaning of life, we find none of this unreasoning hatred; instead, there is a boundless pity for beautiful souls that have been impoverished through wealth.

Yet it is over the people, over the degraded multitude that has ever formed the great majority, that the Son of Man most tenderly yearned. And the poor could listen to the carpenter of Nazareth without suspicion or resentment, for was He not one of themselves? Thus that which turned His townsfolk against Him was the key which has unlocked hearts to Him through the centuries. His hands, too, had been calloused by toil; His shoulders had been bruised by the same yoke of poverty that chafed their own; He, too, in His peasant-home had seen His mother toil, had worn garments poor and patched; He, too, had winced even as they under the petty shifts and humiliations that wear away the cour-

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"HEALING THE SICK"

age of the poor. Only one who had Himself known the pinch of poverty could have estimated the preciousness of the widow's mite; only one who had Himself labored until His muscles ached and every nerve was a-quiver, could so pitifully have called unto the "heavy-laden."

All the homely details of their daily existence He knew. Year after year He had watched the shepherds leading their flocks to pasture, and had seen the fishermen mending their nets upon the shore, or rocking in their heavy boats upon the inland sea. He had talked with the farmers sowing seed in the springtime, and paused beside the vine-dressers at work on the green hill-slope; and all the weather-signs of the country-folk—all the tokens of changing season—were familiar from earliest boyhood to the lad of Nazareth.

Living thus close to the heart of earth's toilers, Christ drew His most beautiful parables from humble sources, familiar to the poorest; the grain of mustard seed, the

ness the Man of Nazareth drew continually from the beauty of earth and sky. Time and again, when sore oppressed, we see Him seek the healing silence of the hills. To the mountains this boy of the highlands withdraws again and again to pray; and in the morning, "rising a great while before day," we see Him stealing from the sleeping hamlet to lose Himself in some high solitude. When news comes of His cousin's death, the delicate grieving soul yearns to mourn in the quiet of the hills, apart from the curious eyes of men; and when the twelve, elate but very weary, return from their first journey of ministry, the Master, with that brooding mother-care which He ever folds about them, bids them "come apart into a desert place to rest awhile." Even in the last week, when the shadows had gathered darkly across His path, it is in a garden,—a garden of gnarled olive trees,—that He seeks peace each night.

The Son of Man was no ascetic, pass-

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"THE LAST SUPPER"

ing with veiled eyes through the world; He opened wide His heart to the sweetness of the earth and to the lovableness of the men and women in it. The bright and animated scene at banquet or marriage festival woke in Him a sympathetic gladness; and He has drawn for us the most delicate pictures of home-life, of bridal joys, of family reunions, of fealty between servant and lord, of joy over the coming of a little child into a home. The sense of human nearness was sweet to Him,—the touch of warm hands, the sound of eager voices in the village street, the loitering groups in the doorways as the evening fell, the noise of little children at play in the market-square. And this Man, who so sternly condemned the elaborate religious rites which had stifled the spontaneous faith of His fathers, was, on the other hand, in closest sympathy with the quaint customs of the common-folk, that ever shrined some deep, poetic origin; and He understood the natural craving of these meagre, color-

less lives for the touch of drama, only possible to them in the pageant of wedding or funeral.

After the forty days of isolation and preparation on the stony western slope, we never again find Jesus shutting Himself away from men, for He needed the affection of His kind, hungering like all sensitive natures for human sympathy. An equal friendship is, perhaps, the rarest joy granted to noble souls, for they breathe an air too thin and cold for their brothers of the valley; only in His Father, indeed, could this exquisite spirit find perfect comprehension. Yet love, with its clairvoyance, will leap many a chasm at which heavy-footed reason halts, and Mary of Bethany and the fisher-boy of Galilee, like á Kempis in his mountains, drew very near to the Master's soul. Beautiful, indeed, to Him who "measured all men by their love," and held precious the least golden grain of affection, must have been the devotion of His humble friends. Sweet to

the tired Master, when the darkness fell, must have been the warm home-welcome in Peter's house beside the sea; and sweetest of all, the sanctuary at Bethany, where He might freely unburden His heart, and rest in the friendship of delicate, loyal souls.

This happiness which He had found in common things, within the reach of the poorest, Christ yearned to share with all. As He had found joy in beautiful things, He strove to awaken in degraded souls the atrophied sense of beauty; and when they gazed with dull throbs of envy at the rich folk flaunting by to gay Tiberias, He pointed to a roadside flower, bidding them rejoice in its grace of line, in its ineffable glory of color and perfume. He who gave of His own tenderness unsparingly, knowing that the cruse of love could never be drained, strove to teach these restless, covetous creatures the beauty of love,—love that banished bitterness from the heart and brought that very kingdom of heaven for which they vaguely prayed. It was not

work that saddened men's days; work, the artisan of Galilee knew well was one of the joys of life,—it was the grudging spirit in which they toiled and the canker of envy that poisoned happiness. And for this galling yoke of sullen slavery He would give them one softened, glorified by love; the yoke that He, himself, had borne. Again and again, by word and deed, He emphasizes the beauty and dignity of personal service, that upon which, even nineteen hundred years ago, the arrogant of the earth had set the spurious stigma of shame. We read that even on the last night, in the upper chamber, when the shadow of death had drawn so nigh, He washed the feet of the twelve, that the sting of false shame might never again wound their hearts.

Even after His death it is in the sweetly familiar act of breaking bread that He appears to the two at Emmaus; and when, through the cold gray dawn, the heavy-hearted fishermen see the beckoning figure

on the beach, blue wreaths of smoke curl upward from fire at His feet, and bread and fish are cooking for them there. The last memory He leaves to man is one of homely loving service.

So the story of the Beautiful Life has come down to us through the years; still its sweetness breathes through the world we live in, still it gladdens and heals the tired souls of men; while the message of the Galilean, grown clearer through the yearning centuries, is plainer, it may be, to our eyes to-day than to the wistful vision of the twelve who broke bread with Him daily in the long ago.

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